

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Pettibone/Traverse Lift, LLC

Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center

Improved Image Leads to Increased Sales for Pettibone

Client Profile:

Pettibone has been manufacturing top-of-the-line material-handling equipment for more than 50 years. In the 1950s, the company revolutionized the job site with the world's first forward-reaching, rough-terrain machine. The Baraga, Michigan, facility employs 150 people.

Situation:

Pettibone's relationship with Northern Initiatives, Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center's (MMTC) Upper Peninsula regional office, a NIST MEP network affiliate, began in 1999 when manager Kevin Walsh needed help instituting Kaizen processes in his plant. "Our relationship began on the operations side. With the help of Northern Initiatives, we experienced a great turnaround. The partnership was tremendously, tremendously successful; so successful, in fact, that I eventually became president of the company." Walsh had been approached at a trade show by a person who thought Pettibone went out of business years. That troubling realization drove Walsh once again to seek out the counsel and services of Northern Initiatives.

Solution:

Northern Initiative's Marketing Services director, Christine Rector, and Pettibone President Walsh examined the company's marketing principal, which Walsh described as selling to anyone who was interested. "Since consulting with Chris and Northern Initiatives, we now focus on value selling." In-house improvements in customer service also resulted from Rector's guidance. "When we first talked, I told her I know people aren't happy," recalled Walsh. "So together we surveyed our top 20 parts customers to find out the problems." One major irritation centered on an ineffective voice mail system that often left callers with a long wait and few answers about pricing, availability of parts, the status of orders and troubleshooting of equipment. Today, an automated Web site offers quick, easy answers to such queries. Other simple solutions to customer complaints have included relocating a receptionist into the parts area and hiring an onsite service engineer to offer immediate technical assistance. "Chris is so good because she's always challenging me. She constantly points out new opportunities -- things that are so basic, so simple, that I should be seeing myself," said Walsh.

At a trade show, Rector quickly picked up on the company's tired, unimaginative booth, disjointed sales materials and lack of aggressive customer follow-up. She likewise surveyed the strengths and weaknesses of its competitors. As a result, the company's public face at such events displays a sophisticated but informative booth area, coordinated literature and video presentation and a formal sales lead and follow-up system that includes direct mail. Another such "redesigned" area was the graphic representation of Pettibone, a single entity that had been around for decades but one that had undergone many modifications in recent years. One had only to pick up any number of promotional pieces to find some with different tag lines, different fonts and even different company names. "It was a very basic concept, but Chris had to emphasize how very important brand equity really was. Now all of our graphics' advertising, signs, brochures, video presentations, and Web site are part of a well-

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thought-out campaign. They display a consistent image and a consistent message," said Walsh.

Buoyed by its new look and new attitude, Pettibone last year organized its first-ever national dealer meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada. With Northern Initiatives' help in promoting the event, handling the logistics, designing programs, recommending seminars and following up with survey results, Walsh said, "The strategic partner retreat was the most successful event ever held by Pettibone and the HEICO companies, our owner. It reinvigorated our dealers and employees, as well as our key suppliers. Everything went so well that we plan to conduct these retreats every two years. In the off years, we'll hold regional meetings."

Pettibone's revitalized outlook is reaching a national audience. According to Walsh, "Right now we're on the front covers of Lift & Access and Lift Applications, and I believe we'll be on another soon."

"Pettibone has a completely different image," enthused Walsh. "Where before some of our colleagues were surprised we were still in business, now we've regained our stature in the industry. Working with Northern Initiatives helped us see the opportunities that were right in front of us. They really got us back on the map."

Results:

- * Developed a clearly defined marketing strategy that promotes value selling over price selling.
- * Unified company image with a single logo and graphic approach on all communications.
- * Improved customer service, including an in-house response system and formal lead and follow-up program for salespeople.
- * Strengthened employee, dealer and supplier relationships by uplifting, informative, state-of-the-art regional/national meetings.

Testimonial:

"Our corporate philosophy had always been we don't spend money on sales and marketing. Northern Initiatives helped change all that. We now spend lots of money on sales and marketing, but they've paid for themselves tenfold."

Kevin Walsh, President